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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

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SUBJECT: DANNY,S DOUBLE WHAMMY: ALN NUMBER THREE ASSEMBLY CANDIDATE AND RIZO,S SISTER JUMP SHIP FOR THE FSLN

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: As part of Sandinista Front (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega's concerted efforts to discredit the political prowess of his competitors, Ortega successfully recruited Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) National Assembly candidate Salvador Talavera and Maria Elena Rizo, the sister of Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate Jose Rizo. Both "converts" were featured during one of Ortega's TV marathons. Talavera -- who is also the President of the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN) -- and Ortega signed their accord on the cloth of a Nicaraguan flag, an act that drew harsh criticism. Talavera's betrayal reflects his lack of scruples on the one hand, but Montealegre's poor judgment in selecting him and the ALN's unfocused leadership on the other. Other ALN and Resistance members had warned Montealegre that placing Talavera so high on the ALN's deputy list was unwise; his campaign manager's refusal to give Talavera the time of day compounded the problem. Talavera's departure has shocked Montealegre and may be the wake up call he needed. Montealegre told DCM on September 17 that he will convene an emergency session on September 18 to address the problem and rally his supporters. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) As part of FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega's concerted efforts to discredit the political prowess of his competitors, Ortega successfully recruited ALN National Assembly candidate Salvador Talavera (ranks third on the ALN's list of national candidates) and Maria Elena Rizo, the sister of PLC candidate Jose Rizo. Both "converts" were featured during one of Ortega's TV marathons, which he calls his "debates with the Nicaraguan people." Talavera -- who is also the president of the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN) -- and Ortega signed their accord on the cloth of a Nicaraguan flag, an act that drew harsh criticism from a number of quarters, including claims that the defacement of the flag violates Nicaraguan laws. (NOTE: According to Article 25 of Nicaragua's Electoral Law, marking or stamping anything on the flag is prohibited, but given the FSLN's control of the CSE and the courts, no action against Ortega is likely to be effective.)

¶3. (C) Accompanying Talavera were several members of the PRN's leadership -- Julio Cesar Blandon, Roberto Ferrey, Jose Benito Bravo ("Comandante Mack"), Jorge Luis Gutierrez and seven PRN department presidents (NOTE: Responding to the concerns of two Resistance leaders (Oscar Sobalvarro and Luis Angel Fley, who support Eduardo Montealegre) regarding Montealegre's decision to include Jose Benito Bravo Centeno ("Comandante Mack") on his list of Parlacen candidates, Embassy addressed the matter with Montealegre and his chief of staff Edmundo Leal in early June (Bravo Centeno ranked third on the ALN's Parlacen list). After we provided information that Bravo Centeno was involved in murder, torture and other human rights abuses during the 1980s and was associated at one point with the FSLN, Montealegre removed Bravo Centeno from the slate, replacing him with Talavera's brother Jose Angel. END NOTE).

¶4. (C) The ALN issued a press release on September 16 condemning Talavera's treachery and calling for him to renounce his position on the ALN Assembly slate. A number of PRN members supporting Montealegre also denounced Talavera, including Oscar Sobalvarro (Comandante Ruben) and Luis Angel Fley (Comandante Johnson). Despite the ALN's calls for his resignation -- including by his brother/ALN candidate for PARLACEN Jose Angel -- Talavera insists that he will remain on the slate. CSE magistrate Emmet Lang informed the press on September 17 that it is too late to make changes in Assembly deputy slates, while on September 18, ALN campaign manager Adolfo Arguello argued on Channel 2 that a precedent exists to substitute names, citing the case of an FSLN candidate who resigned ten days before the November 2001 election and was replaced by another candidate.

¶5. (C) NOTE: The electoral law allows for the resignation or substitution of presidential and vice presidential candidates in cases of force majeure, but does not mention the resignation of legislative candidates. Further, now that the ballots are at the printers, changing the ballot is out of the question -- unless, of course, the FSLN decides it would suit their interests. END NOTE.

¶6. (C) According to ALN contacts, Talavera, who ranks third on the ALN's national list of Assembly candidates, was disgruntled with the ALN's

¶7. (C) COMMENT: In addition to his financial woes, Talavera's former wife has filed a claim against him for alleged domestic abuse (he recently remarried). Possibly, the FSLN is holding the outcome of this case over Talavera's head. Talavera's betrayal reflects his lack of scruples on the one hand, but Montealegre's poor judgment in selecting him and the ALN's unfocused leadership on the other. ALN supporters, including a number of other PRN members, had warned Montealegre that placing Talavera so high on the ALN's deputy list was unwise. The campaign manager's refusal to give Talavera (whose ego knows no bounds) the time of day, compounded the problem. Talavera's departure has shocked Montealegre and may be the wake up call he needed. Montealegre told DCM on September 17 that he will convene an

emergency session on September 18 to address the problem and
rally his supporters. END COMMENT.
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